

Top-level probe into diocese

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INLSA Archbishop Thabo Makgoba. Picture:

Candice Chaplin

A high-level investigation into the affairs of the Anglican Diocese of Pretoria has been established to probe problems that have engulfed the church for almost a year.

The Synod of Bishops, headed by Cape Town Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, is expected to send a task team into the diocese by the end of this month.

Yesterday the provincial office of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa confirmed the establishment of the team, set up in terms of Canon 21.3, which gives the synod, convened of senior bishops of the Southern African region, the power to investigate problems in a diocese.

“Archbishop (Makgoba) and Bishop Jo (Seoka) agreed that it was necessary to initiate a Canon 21.3 process. My office is at present setting up the team.

“It will determine its term of reference at its first meeting, where (the members) will be briefed about the situation,” said provincial office spokesman the Rev Allen Kannemeyer.

He said the team would visit Pretoria to “find out the root causes of the discord that has surfaced in the diocese”.

Their reading of the situation would determine what processes to follow.

“The archbishop and the Synod of Bishops, on whose behalf this team will act, will receive their report and decide on further action if necessary,” he said.

Seoka said yesterday he did not yet have confirmation about the Canon 21.3 process, but confirmed that Makgoba had informed him that he was “initiating the process”.

“There is nothing uncommon about the process. At the moment I cannot confirm who the people sitting on the task team will be or any further information...,” said Seoka.

For nearly a year now, the church has been mired in controversy, with parishioners protesting outside St Alban’s Cathedral and recently going to court over the closure of the cathedral by the bishop.

The Pretoria High Court ordered that a mediation process be undertaken within 30 days and that the cathedral be opened and church activities be restored.

Archbishop Njongo Ndungane, the former archbishop of Cape Town, was approached to act as mediator and the mediation process, Kannemeyer said, could impact on the activities of the Canon 21.3 team as it would address the same situation.

Among allegations that sparked discord included the bishop’s dismissal of Reverend Nkosinami Nkomonde, which was seen as unfair by Nkomonde and parishioners, and the claim that he had misappropriated church funds.

Seoka was taken to the Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) over the Nkomonde matter, but the CCMA declared that the matter fell outside its jurisdiction and referred it back to the diocese.

Another issue was the suspension of Dean Livingstone Ngewu on charges of insubordination and undermining the bishop’s authority.

Ngewu died before the process was finalised.

Two separate memorial services were held for Ngewu, one of them in the Catholic Cathedral after parishioners loyal to the dean claimed the bishop had denied them permission to hold the service in the cathedral.

A second service, led by Makgoba, was later held in the Anglican Cathedral.

Police have confirmed that they are investigating allegations of the misuse of church funds.

<http://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/top-level-probe-into-diocese-1.1313642#.VCEz2Bacxfg>